

THE REMOVAL OF FAMILIES FROM TENNESSEE VALLEY
AUTHORITY RESERVOIR AREAS*

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THIS paper is not devoted to a discussion of the living standards of families in the Tennessee Valley, nor does it describe research techniques used by the Tennessee Valley Authority in making family studies. Rather it is an attempt to discuss one of the most important sociological problems encountered by the Tennessee Valley Authority: the removal of families from reservoir areas.

The execution of the program of the Tennessee Valley Authority to improve navigation and control flood waters necessitates the purchase of land privately owned and occupied and the consequent removal of families to homes outside the purchase area. Rather than turning these families adrift and forcing them to seek their own new locations, a concerted effort is made to accomplish their removal and resettlement with as little injury to their economic status and social environment as possible.

The agricultural extension divisions of the universities in the various Valley states, with a trained farm agent in each county, have assumed the chief responsibility for aiding displaced reservoir families. The extension divisions, in cooperation with the Tennessee Valley Authority, have established relocation services to assist the families who are forced to move to find new homes comparable to the ones they had prior to removal. Although this service is not empowered to render financial assistance, it locates farms for sale, appraises the value of such tracts, and advises with

displaced families as to the type of farms best suited to their needs. Furthermore, its services are available to families whose relocation is made difficult because of health, mental or physical disability, incompetence, or other maladjustment. A social case worker visits each maladjusted family, analyzes its major social and economic problems, and, through cooperation with other agencies, works out plans for the family's removal and readjustment. The relocation service works in very close cooperation with the Farm Credit Administration, the Resettlement Administration, the Works Progress Administration, and other agencies. Thus the service acts as a coordinating and referring agency for the families in need of assistance.

As a basis for rendering the maximum assistance to reservoir families in finding new homes, it is necessary to have information on the social and economic status of each family to be moved. Consequently, one of the first steps taken after the determination of the reservoir area for a particular dam is to make a survey of all the families living within the proposed taking line. Detailed questionnaires are administered to all families. These questionnaires call for information on the financial resources of the family, its size, the condition of the home, the size and type of farm, relocation desires, and other information that will aid in relocating the family to its best advantage.

The primary data from the individual schedules are transferred to punch cards and become a permanent record of the families interviewed. The individual schedules are then made available to the relocation service for its use in dealing

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with individual families. The data on the families of a particular reservoir area offer an insight into the social and economic conditions of the region and serve as a basis for future studies to determine the effect of removal upon families.

Family studies have been made of the Norris, Hiwassee, Guntersville, Wheeler, and Pickwick Landing reservoir areas and include data on approximately 6,500 families. These studies present rather strikingly the major problems to be encountered in the relocation of the reservoir families. In the first place, the families in each of the five regions are predominantly rural and agricultural with little or no industrial experience. The lack of industrial experience on the part of the families and the absence of employment opportunities in nonagricultural activities mean, therefore, that most of the families are limited to agricultural enterprises in their new locations.

Also, most of the families interviewed were natives of their region and had lived throughout their lifetimes within a few miles of their places of birth. Although change of residence was frequent, particularly among the families who did not own their homes, the proportion who had lived in their present communities all their lives ranged from 29.9 to 57.3 per cent. Furthermore, the number of male heads who were living in the county of their birth or a county adjacent thereto exceeded 80 per cent in all the areas except one. Naturally, such families are reluctant to sever their ties with friends, relatives, schools, and churches and move to distant communities.

The place of relocation is further restricted by the fact that the farm families wish to remain in an area where the same general type of farming prevails to which they are accustomed. If they are cotton farmers, they naturally wish to remain

cotton farmers in their new locations. On the other hand, the farm family living in an area of general and self-sufficing farming would not consider moving to an area where the principal crop raised is cotton.

Perhaps one of the most important factors in determining the place and condition of relocation is the financial resources of the family to be relocated. It is generally accepted that the Tennessee Valley is a region of relatively low incomes from farming. The incomes of the families studied were found to be even lower than the average for the Valley as a whole. The median net cash incomes of the families in the five areas range from \$100 to \$267 per year.

Each of the five reservoir areas contained a large number of farm tenants and owners of small farms. Although tenancy was lowest in the Norris area, even here one out of every three farm operators was a tenant. In the three cotton areas, less than 40 per cent of the families owned the land on which they lived. Furthermore, in these cotton areas a large percentage of the tenants consisted of sharecroppers and farm laborers who possess very little livestock, farm machinery, or other assets. Some of the tenant families undoubtedly will be able to remain with their landlords in new locations. Many landlords, however, either do not repurchase farms or purchase smaller farms, thus reducing the need for tenants. Since the financial resources of these tenants are very limited they must relocate on available farms within or near the same community. Their problem of relocation is made more difficult by the fact that they must compete with the tenants that have already been dispossessed by a steadily contracting tenancy system.

Ordinarily the landowner is in a better position to reestablish a home than is the tenant. The appraisal placed upon his

farm is usually comparable in amount to the cost of another farm of equal size and fertility. Nevertheless, the problem of relocation is acute for the landowner with a small holding. In many cases, the amount he receives from the sale of his farm, particularly after deductions for back taxes and mortgages are made, is so small that without advice and assistance he is unable to locate another farm suited to his needs. A high percentage of the landowners in each of the five areas have holdings of less than fifty acres, and many of these, particularly in the cotton areas, have a rather large indebtedness.

Up to March 1, 1937, a total of 4,172 families had moved from the five reservoir areas under consideration. In terms of relocation assistance needed, these families fell roughly into four groups. In the first group were those families who had plans and adequate resources for relocation, and who, consequently, did not need assistance in finding new homes. This group accounted for about 15 per cent of the families and was composed mostly of large landowners who had holdings in other areas or had definitely located farms to which they moved.

Although approximately 44 per cent more of the families had adequate financial resources for removal, they had no definite plans for relocation. For the most part, this group included owners of medium sized farms and fully equipped tenants. These families were in need of advice and assistance in finding new locations suitable for their needs.

Slightly more than a third of the families, mostly tenants and small owners, were found to have little or no financial strength. These families were in need not only of guidance in seeking new homes but also of financial assistance. Fortunately, less than 7 per cent of all families were classified as submarginal. These

families had no resources of their own and were further handicapped by illness, mental or physical disabilities, or by other difficulties.

The characteristics of the reservoir families, their financial resources, their experience, and length of residence within the community indicate that the relocation of most of them would naturally be effected within or near the community in which they previously lived. Studies of the relocated families from the Norris, Wheeler, and Pickwick Landing reservoir areas show that the families have tended to relocate as near as possible to their old homes.

Of the Norris families, 62 per cent relocated in one of the five reservoir counties,¹ and an additional 20.4 per cent relocated in an adjoining Tennessee county. Only 10.8 per cent of the families crossed an intervening county in order to establish a new home in Tennessee. Less than 7 per cent of the families moved outside the state and a majority of these located in Kentucky.

Less than one-fourth of the Norris tenants relocated outside the reservoir counties, and the majority of those either went with their landlords or had relatives and friends in the locality in which they settled. Of the Norris owners that moved, approximately 41 per cent relocated outside the reservoir counties. However, they were chiefly those owners who could finance the purchase of large farms. More than 85 per cent of those purchasing farms for less than \$1,000 and almost 60 per cent of those purchasing farms in the \$1,000-\$3,999 classification relocated in the reservoir counties.

Corresponding data for the families of the Wheeler reservoir area show even

¹ The five counties of the Norris reservoir area are Anderson, Campbell, Claiborne, Grainger, and Union, Tennessee.

greater tendency to resettle within the same region. Of a total of 840 families who have moved from the reservoir,² 78.1 per cent resettled in the county of former residence, and 89.2 per cent relocated in one of the six reservoir counties.³ Of the remaining twenty-two families, fourteen resettled in an Alabama county adjacent to one of the reservoir counties, and eight families moved to other states, six of whom relocated in Tennessee.

Although the resettlement of families from the Pickwick Landing reservoir is less concentrated than that of the Wheeler families, the same tendency prevails. Of 425 families who have moved,⁴ 62.6 per cent resettled in the county of their original residence, and 77.2 per cent established new homes in one of the four reservoir counties.⁵ An additional 9.2 per cent relocated in counties adjacent to the reservoir counties and many of the remaining families in near-by counties. Only twelve of the families moved to states other than Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

The purchase of land by the Authority has removed farm land from use in an

area already somewhat overcrowded. The resettlement of a majority of the reservoir families within this same area has probably resulted in the displacement of other farm families and in a subdivision of existing farms. While no studies have been made to determine the extent to which these conditions have resulted, a sample study of 618 of the Norris reservoir families who moved to new locations indicates that some subdivision of farms has taken place. This study shows that, in general, both owner and tenant families who resettled within one of the five reservoir counties have smaller farms than they had prior to removal.

The Norris follow-up study also throws some light upon the extent to which the relocation service has succeeded in attaining its objective of finding homes for removal families comparable to those they had prior to removal. Although many families have smaller holdings since removal, a larger percentage now own their homes. More than 93 per cent of the Norris families who owned their homes prior to removal have continued as owners in their new locations, and 14.3 per cent of the former tenants are now home owners. Any statement concerning the condition of these families had they not received advice and assistance would be conjecture. It is certain, however, that the relocation agencies have been of material assistance to many families in finding new homes and in taking advantage of the services offered by other organizations.

² The place of relocation is unknown for 69 of the 840 families.

³ The Wheeler reservoir extends into the counties of Lauderdale, Lawrence, Limestone, Madison, Marshall, and Morgan, Alabama.

⁴ The place of relocation is unknown for six of the families.

⁵ The four counties containing the Pickwick Landing reservoir are Hardin, Tennessee; Tishomingo, Mississippi; and Colbert and Lauderdale, Alabama.